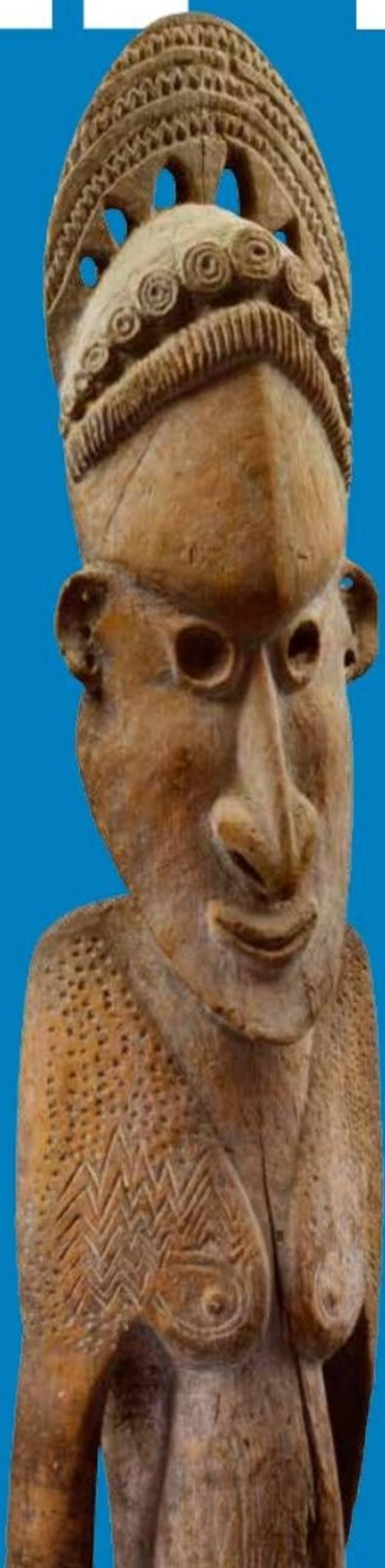


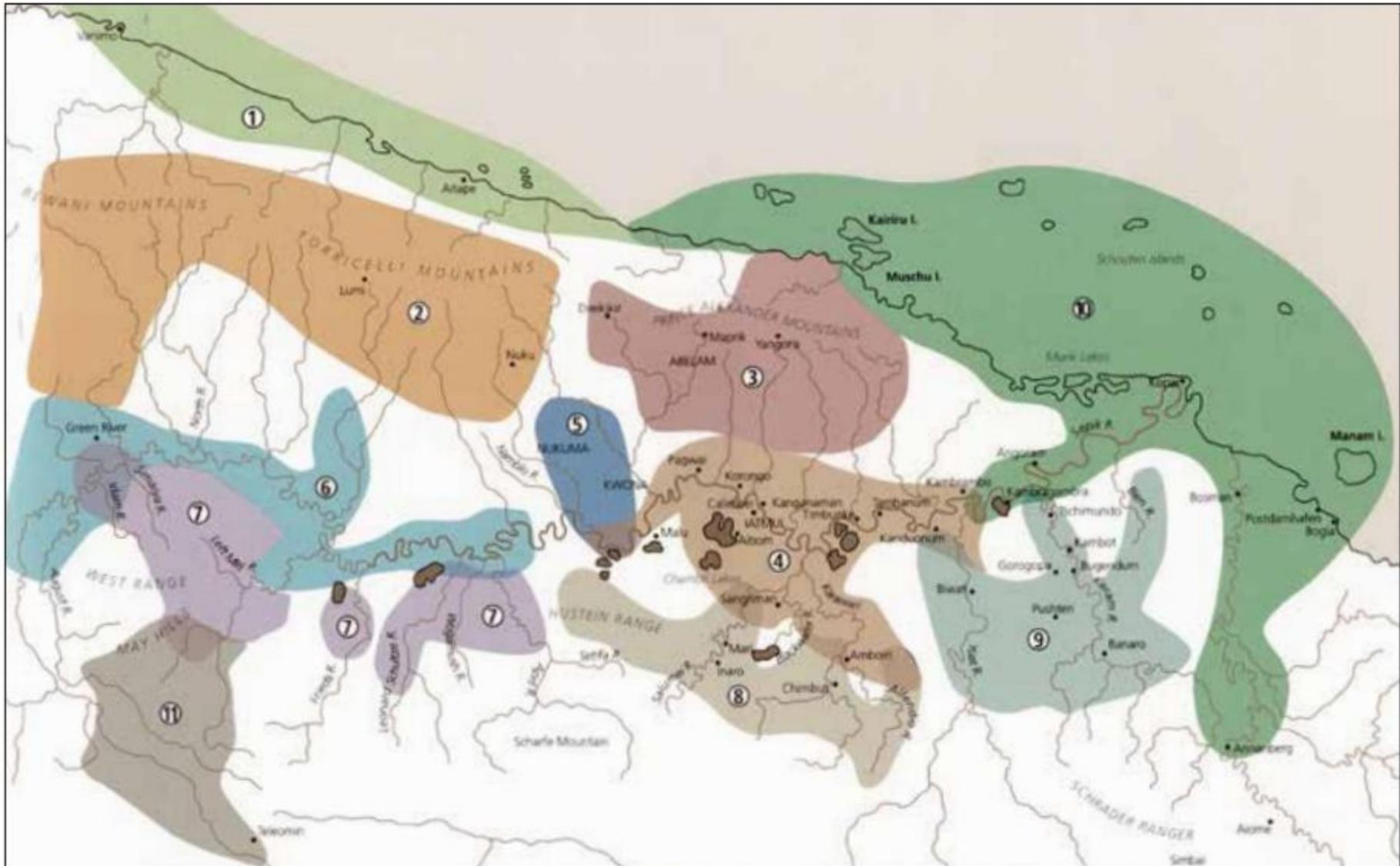
BERNARD DE GRUNNE

# SEPIK



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#### Stylistic regions of the Sepik River

1. North Coast (West)
2. Coastal Range West and border mountains
3. Coastal Range (East): Kwanga – Abelam -Boiken groups
4. Middle Sepik
5. Upper Sepik
6. Upper Sepik mountain range and tributaries
7. Mountains and hills south of the Middle Sepik
8. Tributaries of the Lower Sepik: Yuat and Keram
9. Lower Sepik, North Coast and Ramu
10. Sepik Headwaters Region

Adapted from Philippe Peltier & Floriane Morin, *Ombres de la Nouvelle-Guinée*, Paris, Fondation Mona Bismarck, 2006, p. 93 and Kaepller, Kaufmann and Newton, *Art Océanien*, Citadelles & Mazenod, Paris, 1993, fig. 845

# Kandimbong: On the Ancestor Statuary from the Coastal Sepik Region

by Bernard de Grunne

New Guinea, the second largest island in the world covering a land surface of 785.753 km<sup>2</sup>, populated by roughly eleven million people speaking a stunning total of 1073 different languages, resembles a bird with its head raised in the northwestern end. A political division into two countries, Papua New Guinea to the east and Indonesia to the west is an artificial construction caused by its colonial past as many geographical features, languages, social systems and art styles run across their borders.

New Guinea is geographically speaking dominated by two characteristics: a spine of east-west mountains, the New Guinea highlands, stretching over 1.600 km with its highest peak *Puncak Jaya* culminating at 4,884 meters and the majestic Sepik River running 1125 km from its headwaters in the Victor Emmanuel Range down through a huge basin of lowland swamps and forests towards its mouth a between the Murik and Watam lakes.<sup>1</sup>

The Sepik River, originating in the central highlands of New Guinea and meandering in a north-easterly direction into the Pacific has always acted as the unifying element over the vast area of its watershed, allowing for trade and intercommunication between various groups. Exchange of both utilitarian objects such as weapons, ornament and pottery as well as cultural traits such as ceremony, song, dance, oral tradition caused the diffusion of a large variety artistic styles to and from the estuary of the Sepik and Ramu rivers.

The art producing cultures of the Sepik river lie almost as a separate unexplored continent on the eastern edge of the navigated world until about 1885, unlike the tribal art from Africa with its major civilizations criss-crossed by ancient caravan routes for thousands of years. The cultures living along the Sepik river had neither the use of metal nor a written language and their first contact with the West occurred than one hundred and twenty years ago, in 1885 with the exploration of the mouth of the Sepik by Otto Finsch. It is therefore not surprising that their art forms strike as closer to "primeval" Stone Age civilization.

The discovery of the region of Sepik River is quite late. According to the research by German ethnologist Otto Reche, the first sighting of the coastal area of the Sepik river was the Spaniard Ynigo Ortiz de Retes on the warship *San Juan* in 1545. The first definite news that a large river must empty in the coastal region near the volcanic island of Manan was given by the Dutch world circumnavigators Jacob Le Maire et Willem Schouten in July 1616.<sup>2</sup>

In 1844, Thomas Jefferson Jacobs, midshipman aboard the American clipper Margaret Oakley wrote the first know description of the mouth of the Sepik river.<sup>3</sup>

In 1884, Germany created the protectorate of Neu-Guinea composed of the north-eastern part of New Guinea and the islands of New Britain and New Ireland, naming the mainland where the Sepik flowed Kaiserin-Wilhemland. The same year the Deutsche Neuguinea Kompagnie was formed to identify potential natural resources worthy of development. In 1885, Eduard Dallmann, Captain of the *Deutsche Neuguinea Kompagnie* vessel *Samoa* together with

1 Crispin Howarth, *Myth + Magic. Art of the Sepik River, Papua New Guinea*, Canberra, National Gallery of Australia, 2015, p. 17

2 Otto Reche, *Der Kaiserin-Augusta-Fluss*, in G. Thilenius, ed., *Ergebnisse der Südsee-Expedition 1908-1910, II Ethnographie*, Band 1, 1913, p. 7.  
This major study of the Sepik has been translated luckily for us. Cfr. Otto Reche, *The Empress Augusta/Sepik River*, Translated by John Dennison, University of Otago Working Papers on Anthropology, N° 2, Department of Anthropology, University of Otago, Dunedin, 2015

3 Crispin Howarth, *op. cit.*, 2015, p. 17

ethnologist Otto Finsch made the first exploration of the Sepik region venturing about 50 kilometers up the river. Finsch named the river for the Empress and for the next 35 years the Sepik was known as the Kaiserin-Augusta-Fluss (Empress Augusta River).

The change of name from Kaiserin-Augusta-Fluss to the Sepik river occurred officially when the geographer Walter Berhmann, irritated by the custom of using names of members of the Imperial family to designate geographical landmarks decided to change it to the Sepik River in 1922.<sup>4</sup> Other names than Sepik could have been chosen as the German ethnographer Otto Reche had already remarked in 1908 that the Sepik changed name every thirty or forty kilometers starting from the lower reach starting with the names Sipik, Abschima to Azimar and Kokuan.<sup>5</sup>

After the defeat of Germany in 1918, the territory was designated Mandated Territory of New Guinea and entrusted to the Government of Australia in 1920. The territory of Papua and New Guinea became an independent nation in 1975 as a Commonwealth Realm with Elizabeth II as its Head of State.

The history of the collection and subsequent appreciation of Sepik art is roughly contemporary to that of the arts styles of Sub-Saharan Africa. Some of the earliest documented objects came to the Berlin Museum für Völkerkunde as early as 1888 but the vast majority of their extensive collections was gathered between 1886 and 1914. Between 1886 and 1887, very short expeditions organized by the New Guinea Company on the ship *Samoa* travelled 380 miles up the river. The Sepik river region slipped into oblivion for the next twenty years until 1908, apart from the setting up of a trading station by the New Guinea Company in the village of Watam in 1901, managed by a Chinese man who sold ethnological specimens to the captains of visiting ships.<sup>6</sup>

In 1908, on the steamer *Siar* (Captain Voogdt), Herr Heine, administrator of the New Guinea Company visited the Lower Sepik 120 kilometers up to the village of Pagem(Magem) accompanied by D. George Dorsey of Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, collecting a large number of ethnographic specimens.<sup>7</sup>

In 1909 the Hamburg Südsee Expedition to Micronesia and Melanesia under the stewardship of Georg Thilenius collected about 900 ethnographic objects up to about 436 kilometers up the Sepik reaching the village of Malu, just downstream of present day Ambunti.

Several weeks later in 1909, the New Guinea Company steamship *Siar* (Captain Haug) with Otto Schlaginhaufen and Richard Neuhauss collected many works which ended up in the Dresden and Berlin Museums of Ethnography.<sup>8</sup>

At the same time, in August 1910 from America, The Joseph Field Expedition directed by Albert B. Lewis scoured the lower portion of the Sepik to form a great collection of the Field Museum, Chicago, collected along the Sepik River as far as Jambum, about 15 km upstream from Ambunti.<sup>9</sup>

The last of the German collecting expeditions on the Sepik was the Kaiserin-Augusta-Fluss Expedition of 1912-13. Indeed, Felix von Luschan, the director of the Berlin Museum für Ethnographie was the first to recognize and appreciate the exceptional artistic power and beauty of woodcarvings from the Sepik.<sup>10</sup> Aware of the stunning discoveries of the early collections of 1908 and 1909, he compared them "to the revelations of the antiquities of Benin

<sup>4</sup> Walter Berhmann, *Im Stromgebiet des Sepik. Eine deutsche Forschungsreise in Neuguinea*, August Scherl, Berlin 1922, P. 39.

<sup>5</sup> Otto Reche, op. cit. 2015, p. 19

<sup>6</sup> Reche, 2015, p. 9

<sup>7</sup> Robert L. Welsch, ed., *An American Anthropologist in Melanesia. A.B. Lewis and the Joseph N. Field South Pacific Expedition 1909-1913*, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, 1998, vol. II, p. 161

<sup>8</sup> Otto Schlaginhaufen, "Eine ethnographische Sammlung vom Kaiserin-Augusta-Fluss in Neu-Guinea," in *Abhandlungen und Berichte des königlichen zoologischen un anthropologisch-ethnographischen Museums zu Dresden*, 13 (2), 1910, pp. 1-74 for Dresden; von Felix Luschan, "Zur Ethnographie des Kaiserin-Augusta-Flusses," in *Baessler-Archiv*, 1911, 1, 103-117 and Richard Neuhauss, *Deutsch-Neu-Guinea*, vol. I, II, & III, Berlin, D. Reimer, 1911 for the Berlin collection.

<sup>9</sup> Welsch, 1998

<sup>10</sup> Felix von Luschan, "Zur Ethnographie des Kaiserin-Augusta-Flusses," in *Baessler-Archiv*, 1910, I, p. 111

in 1897".<sup>11</sup> This expedition was funded by the German colonial office by subsidies shared by various German states confederated under the Emperor. The steamship *Kolonialgesellschaft* under the command of Captain Hollack (the famous Captain H. which remained anonymous for a long time before Kaufman was able to identify him<sup>12</sup>) with Walter Berhmann as geographer who produced maps of the Sepik River used for several decades, and Adolph Roesicke and Richard Thurnwald as ethnologists, collected over 5000 ethnographic items.<sup>13</sup> The proportions of each state's contribution determined each participant share of the ethnographic collections Prussia (Berlin Museum) giving the largest contribution (83%) received 4,196 of the 5,074 works collected, Lubeck of the Hansa League got 136 pieces(2,5%), Saxony (the Dresden Museum), Bavaria (Munich museum ) Wurtemberg ( Stuttgart museum) all received lesser numbers.<sup>14</sup> Some of the objects from the personal collection of Captain Hollack and his crew were sold to the Überseemuseum in Bremen and to the University Museum in Philadelphia in 1922.<sup>15</sup>

Following World War I, the late 1920's and the early 1930's saw continued research on the arts of the Sepik beginning with Paul Wirz in 1923 and Felix Speiser in 1930, both of whose collections went to the Museum für Völkerkunde in Basel. Geoffrey Bateson concentrated on the middle Sepik between 1930-35 while Margaret Mead was in the Yuat region in 1933-4. The Korrigane Expedition of 1934-6 brought back objects from the Lower and Middle Sepik areas some of which were acquired by the Musée de l'Homme, Paris, while Lord Moyne collected in 1936 pieces which he gave to the British Museum . Since the second world war, research on specific art styles of the Sepik River have multiplied.

The first attempt to classify the artistic production of the vast Sepik region was the exhibition *Kunststile am Sepik*("Art Styles of the Sepik") curated by Alfred Bühler at the Basel Museum in 1960. Buhler describes six large stylistic groups within the Sepik art styles.<sup>16</sup> His six stylistic provinces were further refined by Christian Kaufmann over the years.<sup>17</sup> In his latest map, Kaufmann has expanded these styles to eleven stylistic provinces as seen on this map.<sup>18</sup>

The focus of my short essay is a group of human figures varying in size from 30 to 80 cm all originating in the Coastal Sepik region ranging from the Murik Lakes to the north west to mouth of the Ramu river to the south east. Ideally, to define with precision this regional style, one should go back to all the statues with early accession dates from the various German museums plus the collections from the Field Museum in Chicago and the objects in the Missiemuseum in Steyl to plot on a map the precise locations of collection or manufacture of these statues. One should also keep in mind that works of arts, probably more frequently masks than statues could have been used in regional trade networks as exchange goods connected to specific cults such as dances, songs and magic. These statues could belong thus to a "style" not connected to a specific linguistic group but to a greater regional style shared by a series of societies along the Sepik.

A proof of the difficulty of pinpointing accurately the geographical distribution of a specific style of statuary comes from the results of recent scholarship carried out in the 1970's. According to oral traditions, art styles of Coastal Sepik and more specifically the Murik lakes originally came from two brothers and cultural heroes Andena and Dibadiba which came down from upstream of the Sepik river in a canoe to teach the art of carving and all important art forms

11 Christian Kaufmann, Postscript: The Relationship between Sepik Art and Ethnology, in Suzanne Greub, ed., *Art of the Sepik River*, Tribal Art Center, Basel, 1985, p. 33

12 C. Kaufmann, "Le fleuve Sepik," in P. Peltier et F. Morin ed., *Ombres de Nouvelle-Guinée*, Fondation Mona Bismarck, Paris, 2006, p. 126

13 Walter Berhmann, *Im Stromgebiet des Sepik. Eine deutsche Forschungsreise in Neuguinea*, August Scherl, Berlin 1922, Adolph Roesike, "Mitteilungen über ethnografische Ergebnisse der Kaiserin-Augusta-Fluss-Expedition", in *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, 1914, n° 46, pp. 507-522, Stolle, 1914, Heinz Kelm, *Kunst vom Sepik*, Berlin Museum für Völkerkunde , vol.I & vol. II, 1966 & vol. III, 1968

14 C. Kaufmann, " Swiss and German Ethnographic Collections as Source Materials: A report on Work in Progress," in Nancy Lutkehaus, ed., *Sepik Heritage. Tradition and Change in Papua New Guinea*, Crawford House Press, Bathurst, 1990, p. 592 4

15 For Hollack, see C. Kaufmann, "Le fleuve Sepik," in P. Peltier and F. Morin ed., *Ombres de Nouvelle-Guinée*. Fondation Mona Bismarck, Paris, 2006, p. 126

16 Alfred Bühler, *Kunststile am Sepik*, Museum für Volkskunde, Basel, 1960

17 Christian Kaufmann, "Postscript :the Relationship between Sepik Art and Ethnology, » in Suzanne Greub, ed. , *Art of the Sepik River*, Tribal Art Center Basel, 1985, pp. 33-44

18 See C. Kaufmann, "Le fleuve Sepik", in P. Peltier and F. Morin, ed., *Ombres de Nouvelle-Guinée. Arts de la grande île d'Océanie dans les collection Barbier-Mueller*, The Mona Bismack Foundation Paris, Somogy éditions d'art, 2006 p. 93

such as small amulet figurines (called *brag*), large ancestral figures (*kandimbong*) and canoe heads. The art of carving was then passed down from village to village only in certain families as a novice sculptor is apprenticed to his father or uncle, although he may also learn from other master carvers.<sup>19</sup>

According to the research by Beier and Aris, Coastal Sepik artists strive to achieve perfection in the symmetry and proportions of their works. Members of the community may express their approval or criticism of the artist's skills by describing the work as *tosiyan* (it stands out well), *dawan* (enough) or simply *tokai tamari* (you have done well). A carving may be praised as *aretogo* (beautiful – the same word that could be applied to a woman or a flower) or *moago* (ugly). An inventive carver may be praised for his *nonon* (imagination).<sup>20</sup>

Being an Africanist by training, these concepts show the importance of the role of Sepik artist in their own art history. Aesthetics qualities such as symmetry, balance beauty, ugliness have been studied for many styles in African art since the 1960's. Great scholarship on the Yoruba art criticism by William Fagg and my mentor Robert F. Thompson, on the style of Baule Stauary by Susan Vogel, on the Fang by Fernandez to name a few as well as important symposiums on this topic have proliferated.<sup>21</sup> The research by Beier and Aris on Coastal aesthetics only demonstrates how universal these concepts are and how one needs more fieldwork on the Sepik river can expand our understanding of the birth and evolution of styles in this area of world art.

These important ancestral effigies are generally called *kandimbong* and represent personifications of clan founders, famous clan founders and also mythical cultural heroes<sup>22</sup>. These "ancestor" figures share certain common formal traits. The majority are standing male human statues, rather elongated, with an oversized head, slightly oval in shape and terminating in a conical point on top of the head used to inset a wig of human hair alluding to the fashion of hair dressing recorded among men as early as 1844 and up 1914.<sup>23</sup> Other formal characteristics are the large disc-shaped eyes inset with small shells, delicately modelled pierced nose with flaring nostrils, narrow thin arms framing the torso, muscular bent knees and slightly sloping feet. The red ochre paint covering the majority of these figure is also used as body paint for ceremonial events.<sup>24</sup>

These *Kandimbong* figures were all carved from blocks of wood using stone-blades adzes of various sizes with the finer details engraved by sharp stone, bone or tooth blades using small teeth of rodents such as rats, flying foxes or even pigs. Color was a magically important part of these ceremonial statues. The yellow and bright orange ochres was apparently traded in compact lumps from Lake Chambri arrear further upstream whereas white was created from burning and crushing shells.<sup>25</sup>

The majority of statues presented here date back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century or earlier as they are carved with non-metal stone-and bone tooth bladed adzes. Metal blades became available on the Coastal Sepik region after 1900 and further upstream among the latmul only after 1908.<sup>26</sup> The use of non-metal tools impacted the modelling of the bodies and the details of decoration which tend to be more subtle, fluid, less rigid with limbs and faces feeling more

19 Uli Beier and Peter Aris, « Sigia. Artistic Design in Murik lakes,» in *Gigibori, A magazine of Papua New Guinea Cultures*, vol. 2, n° 2, October 1975, pp. 17-36

20 Beier & Aris, 1975, p. 17

21 Marian W. Smith, ed., *The Artist in Tribal Society*, London Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961; Warren L d'Azevedo, *The Traditional Artist in African Societies*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1973; Robert F. Thompson, *African Art in Motion*, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1974; Susan Vogel, *Beauty in the eyes of the Baule*, Philadelphia, ISHI , 1980.

22 Crispin Howarth, *Myth + Magic. Art of the Sepik River, Papua New Guinea*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 2015, p. 67. Reche (1913:378) identifies a similar figure from the village of Kopar as *kadibon*, Lipset(1997.p. 281) names these figure *Kandimbong* and Kaufmann (2006, P.414) writes *ka(n) dimboan(g)*. See Howarth, 2015, pp. 215:217

23 Howarth, op. cit., 2015, p. 67.

24 David Lipset, *Mangrove Man: dialogics of Culture in the Sepik Estuary*, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 157

25 Peter Ryan, ed., *Encyclopedia of Papua and New Guinea*, Melbourne University Press, 1972, p. 31 in Howarth, 2015, p. 215

26 Reche, 2015, P. 19-20 & 219; Walter Berhmann, *Im Stromgebiet des Sepik. Eine deutsche Forschungreise in Neuguinea*, August Scherl, Berlin 1922, P. 60 and C. Coiffier and D. Newton, "Sculpture from the Sepik Region", in Jacques Kerchache, ed., *Sculptures. Africa. Asia. Oceania. America*, Paris, Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 2001, p. 297,footnote 16



Coastal Sepik seated figure by the Guiness Master.

Height: 25 cm

• Provenance:

Collected by Walter Edward Guiness 1<sup>st</sup> baron of Moyne from Ernest Wauchope at Awar plantation on the Ramu River in 1936

British Museum, inv. n° OC1936.0720.171

• Publication:

Cottie Burland, *Dieux et démons*, Paris Edition Cercle d'Art, 1973, plate 85

Lissant Bolton, "The Strength of women", in Lissant Bolton et alii, *Melanesia. Art and Encounter*, London The British Museum Press, 2013 p. 115, fig. 102



Coastal Sepik seated figure by the Guiness Master.

Height: 24,5 cm

• Provenance:

Collection Claudius Côte, Paris

Paris, Musée de l'Homme, 1960

Musée du quai branly Jacques Chirac inv. N° 71.1960.112.18



Coastal Sepik seated figure by the Guiness Master

Height: 25 cm

• Provenance:

Possibly Walter Bondy, Berlin/ Paris

Charles Ratton, Paris, inv. n° 7992

Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York, 1934

Collection Charles Suydam Cutting, New York, 1935

Collection John Friede, Rye

• Publication:

J. Friede, *New Guinea Art: Masterpieces of the Jolika Collection of Marcia and John Friede*, 2005, vol. 1, p. 100-101 et vol. 2, N° 94

Sotheby's Paris, *Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie*, 16 juin 2010, lot 6

organic than mechanic. This Pre-contact No-Iron touch has best been described by Claytus Yambon a traditional latmul carver. For him a stool tool gives a very smooth finish as the carver does not chip too much wood at any one time: "as stone tools were not too sharp, the carver must worked bit by bit, and moved over the wood slowly, slightly and it just flows smoothly."<sup>27</sup> Each pre-contact sculpture took much more time to be finished, a time consuming task taking up to one month to complete a work of art.

The majority of statues presented in my catalogue are essentially what Reche was the first to identify as "ancestor figures". In his ground-breaking study based on his fieldwork on the Sepik river in 1909, Reche was the first scholar to define two major types: naturalistic ancestor figures and spirit figures whose face is covered by a mask. The first type of ancestor figures can be considered as portraits as they reproduce many of the uniquely characteristics features of a deceased person. Indeed, they are fitted with a wig of human hair and decorated with a loin cloth and woven armbands and leg bands.

Reche suggests that these ancestor statues could be amplifications and an evolution of the human skulls of the deceased. The prototypes for these ancestral figures are large wooden torsos with a real skull attached as its head like the one collected by Muller in 1909 in the village of Kopar.<sup>28</sup> Beier and Aris confirm some sixty year later this information as they note that one must distinguish carvings with a human naturalistic nose and those with a spirit nose. Portrait of real ancestors *kandimbong* whose physical and spiritual presence is necessary during male initiation

<sup>27</sup> Claytus Yambon, "The latmul way of carving", in Lissant Bolton et alii, *Melanesia. Art and Encounter*, London, The British Museum Press, 2013, p. 120

<sup>28</sup> Height: 191 cm in the collections of the Hamburg, Museum für Völkerkunde inv. N° H.S.6537 published in Reche, 1913, Abb. 399, p. 376



Coastal Sepik figurine by the Ratton Master

Height: 30 cm

• Provenance:

Collection Claudius Côte, Paris

Charles Ratton, Paris avant 1960

Paris, Musée de l'Homme, Inv. n° MH 60.112.5

Paris, Musée du Quai Branly Jacques Chirac Inv. N° 71.1960.112.5

• Publication:

Albert C. Ambesi, *Oceanic Art*, 2e ed. The Hamlyn Publishing Group Ltd, London, 1970, p. 32, n°14.

Alain Nicolas, *Art Papou, Austronésiens et Papous de Nouvelle-Guinée*, Musée d'Arts Africains, Océaniens, Amérindiens, Centre de la vieille Charité, Marseille, 2000, p. 254, fig. 250



Coastal Sepik Figurine by the Ratton Master

Height: 18,5 cm

• Provenance:

Collected by Korvettenkatipän Rudolf Habenicht between 1899 and 1901

Braunschweig, Städtische Museum, inv. n° AV 1066, 1912

• Publication:

Ulrich Menter, *Ozeanien-Kult und Visionen*, Detmold, Lippischen Landesmuseum, Prestel Verlag, München, 2003, p. 33, plate 6

rites show a fairly naturalistic modelling on the nostrils. *Kandimbong* figures are carved to honor an important man in the clan and will be used for the initiation of that man's or his brother's sons. Kept normally in the *haus tambaran*, the figures can also be kept for up to three months in the bush with the boys when they go into seclusion. *Kandimbong* figures are activated through magic leaves and rituals incantations and songs called *timit* and once activated it has the power of speaking through various people in trance and in dreams.

Medium size figures called *gai masok* show the very typical long trunk-like or beak-like spirit noses which resemble bird's beaks such as eagles and other varieties of volatiles or even a prawn tail.<sup>29</sup> They are used as canoe spirits which are placed in a newly launched outrigger to guide it safely during trade expeditions. According to Otto Reche, the main formal characteristic that differentiate them from the *kandimbong* ancestor figures lies in the treatment of the eyes which are slanting and deeply hollowed out in the facial plane and the long nose.<sup>30</sup> This long nose style is found not only on free-standing masked figures but also on the finials of slit gong, war shields, wooden pestles, handles of hand drums, stools and headrests.<sup>31</sup>

29 Beier & Aris, 1975, p. 21

30 Reche, 2015, p. 386

31 See Barry Craig, ed., *Living Spirits with Fixed Abodes*, Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 2010, p. 126

A final category of figurative sculptures is the small amulet size figures, called *brag* are found in much larger numbers and are used as personal charms giving their owners protection wherever they went, providing them with good luck for fishing expedition and even used as "rain charms to insure good crops.<sup>32</sup>

I would like to suggests that in Coastal Sepik style we can single out individual hands in a manner similar to that in African art history. According to research by Beier and Aris, from his teacher, the young carver will absorb a style, which is referred to as *darin* or "hand" by the people of the region. The approach used for this identification derives from the longstanding method of formal analysis used by art historians for Greek painted pottery, where, like for most traditional ritual sculptures from the Sepik region, the proper names of most of the individual artists have been lost to time, though clear indicators of particular hands or ateliers remain embedded in the art itself.

My research is guided by one overriding principle, that is, the identification of great artists whose style appears to be the most developed and classical, *la ligne des hauteurs* as Henri Focillon put it for great medieval sculptors. The art historian George Kubler noted at the end of his seminal study *The Shape of Time* that our generation of art historians is discovering little by little that meaning and form are equivalent. In other words, one should place morphology on the same level as iconology. Svetlana Alpers goes even further when she notes that in the study of societies where artefacts often stand alone without any verbal record, the style (i.e. its "formal" components) of art facts constitutes the historical sequence.<sup>33</sup> The historian Jan Vansina seems to accept this proposition. For him, following Focillon, style refers to the formal properties of works of art. He separates meaning from style analysis and considers art history as the study of changes in shape over time.<sup>34</sup>

Since styles are invented by artists, one can focus on the study of Master Hands or great sculptors, an approach which one could apply to the vast corpus of wooden statuettes from the Coastal Sepik stylistic region. My approach in African art studies has been to give these anonymous artists conventional names based generally on the name of the village where they were first collected or the name of the first prominent collector who owned them or this institution who owns it.

As a first step in this research for individual hands in Coastal Sepik styles, I would like to single out two artists: the Guiness Master and the Ratton Master. The first Master, the Guiness Master, carved at least three small female crouching figures all wearing a type of long elaborate coiffure probably representing an initiation braided hood worn by women.<sup>35</sup> The name of the Guiness Master originated from the most famous work by him collected in the Awar plantation run by Ernest Wauchope by Walter Guiness, 1<sup>st</sup> Lord Moyne during Guiness's expedition on the Sepik in 1936. I have always loved this work since it graced the cover of the book *Gods and Demons in Primitive Art* by Cottie Burland in 1973. A second work by the Guiness Master is in the collections of the Musée du quai branly Jacques Chirac and the third was for a while part of the John and Marcia Friede Collection on loan at the de Young Museum in San Francisco.<sup>36</sup> The Ratton Master is known by two small figurines of the amulet type carved in a very refined style with a characteristic treatment of the head decorated by a series of three deep grooves surrounding the oval shaped eyes. This appellation come from the figurine at the musée du quai branly which was first sold by Charles Ratton to French collector Claudio Côte in the 1950's.<sup>37</sup> The second work by the same hand collected between 1899 and 1901 is currently in the collections of the Braunschweig Museum.<sup>38</sup>

32 Howarth, 2015, p. 68.

33 Svetlana Alpers, «Style is What You Make It: The Visual Arts Once Again,» in Berryl Lang, *The Concept of Style*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979, p. 96

34 Jan Vansina, *Art History in Africa*, London, Longman, 1984, p. 78

35 L. Bolton "The Strength of Women. A Figure from the Ramu Delta," in Lissant Bolton et alii, ed., *Melanesia. Art and Encounter*, London, The British Museum Press, 2013, p. 118

36 Paris, Musée du quai branly Jacques Chirac, inv. N° 71.1960.112.18 and Sotheby's Paris, *Arts d'Afrique Noire et d'Océanie*, June 16, 2010, lot 6

37 Albert Ambesi, *Oceanic Art*, London, the Hamlyn Publishing Group, 1970, p. 32, N° 14

38 Ulrich Menter, *Ozeanien-Kult und Visionen*, Detmold, Lippischen Landesmuseum, Prestel Verlag, München, 2003, p. 33, plate 6

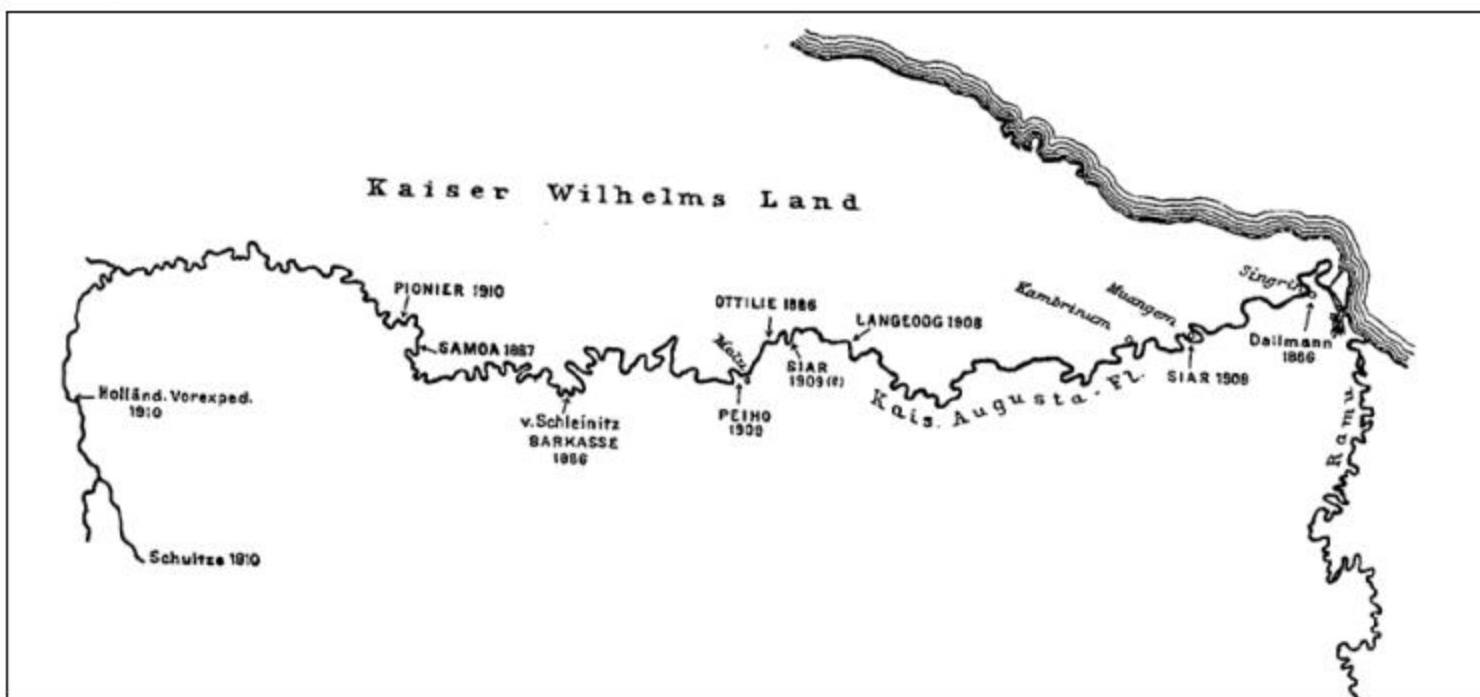


Kevin Conru, *New Guinea Art in the Field Museum, Chicago*,  
Photographs by Ronald Clyne, Brussels, 2010, p. 57

Otto Reche, "Der Kaiserin-Augusta-Fluss," in G. Thilenius,  
ed. *Ergebnisse der Südsee-Expedition 1908-1909*,  
*II Ethnographie: A. Melanesien, Band 1*, Hamburg,  
L. Friederichsen, 1913, Tafel LXX

The various groups from the Coastal Sepik region produced some of the weirdest, yet surely of the most exciting of all tribal styles and the more one looks at these objects the more they impress us as the products of a world gone mad, very mad for art as Douglas Fraser had remarked.<sup>39</sup> In its many expressions, Coastal Sepik art runs from the idealized naturalism to inventive abstraction. One of the main iconographic motifs is the human form with an enlarged head, elongated torso and shortened limbs. Another characteristic of Lower Sepik art is the exaggeration of the nose, which can be sometimes flattened and bulbous, and in other instances is elongated in imitation of a bird beak such as the head of the Rhinoceros hornbill. A third stylistic element is the presence of the curving line conceived both as a surface ornament and in the treatment of three-dimensional form.

Let us hope more research will allow the world to admire these unique art forms as the creation of many very talented artists who will emerge from their anonymity as more scholarship will enrich our understanding of their fantastic creativity.



Map of Farthest points of the early exploration journeys from Reche, 1913, fig.2

<sup>39</sup> Douglas Fraser, *The many faces of Primitive Art*, Englewood Cliff, 1966, p. 185

Early Explorations on the Kaiserin-Augusta-Fluss (adapted from Welsh, 1998 and Kaufmann 2006)

YEAR	VESSEL	PARTICPANTS	FARTHEST POINT REACHED
1885	Samoa	Otto Finsch Capt. Eduard Dallmann	c. 50 km
April 1886	Samoa	Capt. Eduard Dallmann	c. 120 km
July 29- August 10 1886	Ottolie	Gregor von Schleinitz Carl Schrader Max Hollrung Carl Hunstein	c. 480 km
June 28 – July 13, 1887	Samoa	Carl Schrader Max Hollrung Carl Hunstein C. Schneider Herr Thomas (Lutheran missionary) Herr Eich (Lutheran missionary)	c. 610 km
1890	Ottolie	H.C. Bluntschli H. Sechstroh	c. 30 km
1906	Seestern	E. Krauss	c. 10 km
August 1908	Siar	George A. Dorsey Capt. H. Voogdt Georg Heine	c. 120 km
Nov. 20 to Nov. 26 1908	Langeoog	Carl Georg Friederici Bezirkassessor A. Full Capt. Roscher	c. 335 km
May 23 - June 5, 1909	Peiho	Friedrich Fülleborn Otto Reche Wilhelm Müller Fritz E. Hellwig Capt. Richard Vahsel	c. 436 km
July 30 - August 9, 1909	Siar	Otto Schlaginhaufen Richard Neuhauss Rudolf Schlechter Georg Heine Dr. Scholz Dr. Hoffman Capt. Haug	c. 347 km
Nov. 18-22, 1909	Cormoran	Albert Hahl Capt. Pfarrius	c. 339 km
July 2-August 3, 1910	Edi	Capt Rambonnet	
August 3-17 1910			
August 1910	Siar	Capt. Stoemer Albert Buell Lewis	c. 360km
October 1910	Madang	Capt. Jensen	c. 216 km
September 10- Nov. 26, 1910	Edi, Java	Leonard Schultze	
	Pelikan	Kopp A. Stollé Voelz	
October 1911	Madang	Capt. Voogdt	c. 126km
November 1911	Planet		c. 20 km
January 1912	Madang	Capt. Voogdt	c. 216 km
February 1912	Komet	Dr. Stollé	
1912-14	Kolonialgesellschaft	Capt. Hollack Arthur Stollé Walter Berhmann Joseph Bürgers C.L. Ledermann Adolph Roesike Richard Thurnwald	c. 450km

# 01

## Coastal Sepik Ancestor Statue Height : 69 cm

### • Provenance :

Collection Tristan Tzara, Paris, circa 1920  
Christophe Tzara, Paris  
Philipp Goldman, London  
Baudouin de Grunne Wezembeek-Oppem  
Bernard de Grunne, Brussels  
Private Collection

### • Publication :

Cottie A. Burland, *Dieux et démons*, Editions Cercle d'Art, Paris, Artia Prague, 1973, plate 90  
Bernard de Grunne, *Art Papou*, Bruxelles, Louis Musin éditeur, 1979, cover  
*Art et Objets Tribaux II, Regard sur une collection*, Philippe Guimiot, Bruxelles 1995, Fig.58  
Frank Herreman, ed., *Océanie. Signes de rites, symboles d'autorité*, Bruxelles, ING, Fonds Mercator, 2008, p. 48, plate 26



Tristan Tzara in front of some of his Oceanic art collection circa 1920



Coastal Sepik Ancestor statues

Height: 44 cm and 46 cm

### • Provenance:

Leipzig, Grassi Ethnographic Museum inv. N° 9142 & 9137  
before 1908

### • Publication:

Otto Reche, *Der Kaiserin-Augusta-Fluss*, Hamburg, L. Friederichsen 1913, plate LXX, N° 7



# 02

Coastal Sepik Ancestor Statue  
Height : 64 cm

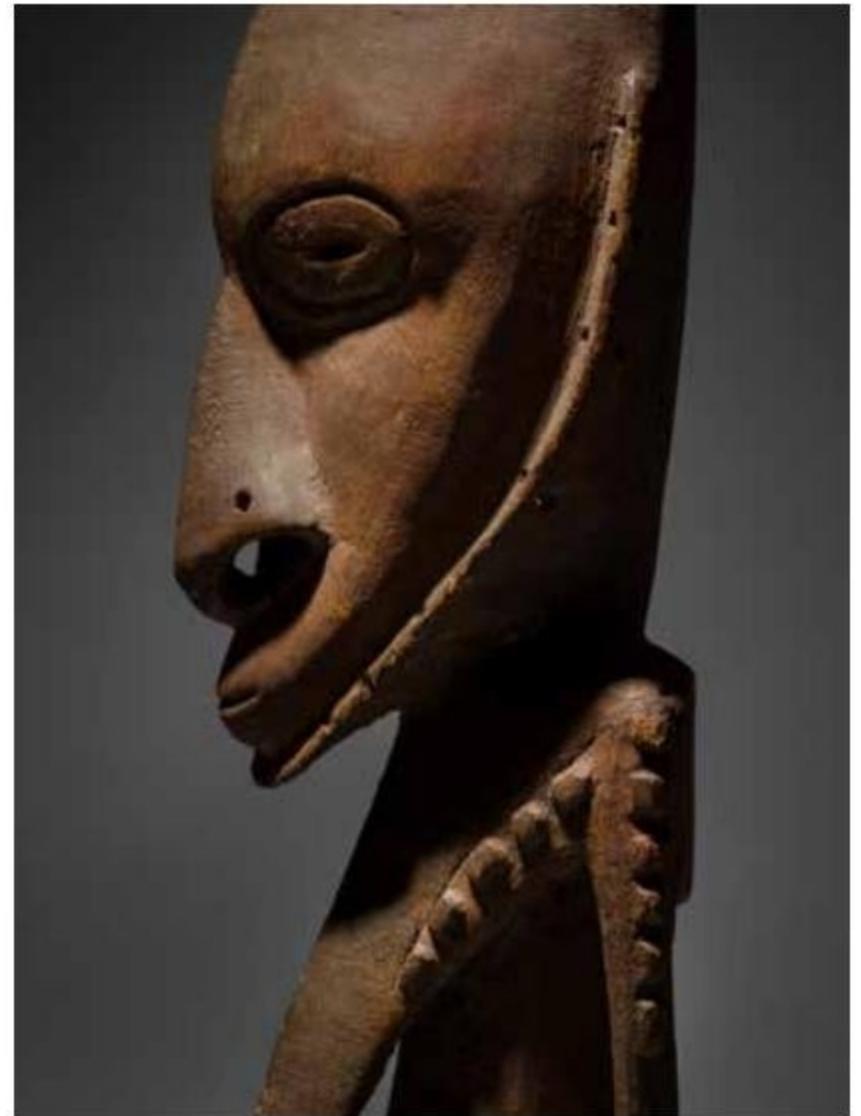
• Provenance :

Gijsbertus Oudshoorn, La Haye, Pays-Bas  
Eddy A. Hof, La Haye, Pays-Bas

• Publication :

*Nieuw-Guinea Kunst uit Privé Bezit*, Etnografisch Museum, Delft, 1958, ill. 23

*Aesthetics*, Galerie Alain Bovis, 2015, pp. 50-51



Coastal Sepik Ancestor Figure, Height: 28,7 cm

• Provenance:

Sold by J.F. Umlauff, Hamburg in 1905 to the Field Museum of Natural History,  
Chicago, inv. N° 97262

• Publication:

Allen Wardwell, *The Art of the Sepik River*, The Art Institute of Chicago, 1971,  
p.37, Fig.55



# 03

Coastal Sepik Ancestor Figure  
Height : 39 cm

• Provenance :

Collected by Captain Haug during the Kaiserin-Augusta-Fluss expedition in 1909  
Stuttgart, Linden Museum, inv. N° NS 339  
Wayne Heathcote, London  
Serge Schoffel, Bruxelles  
Collection Michel Boulanger, Liège



Coastal Sepik Ancestor Figure Height: 72 cm  
• Provenance:  
Village of Manganum (Station Marienberg, Murik Lagoons)  
Gift of Walter Berhmann, 1914  
Stuttgart, Linden Museum inv. n° 92.709  
• Publication:  
Fridrich Kussmaul, ed., *Un musée. Trois continents. Arts d'Afrique, d'Océanie, d'Amérique. Collection ethnographique du Linden Museum de Stuttgart*, Bruxelles, Palais des Beaux Art, 1983, plate B67



# 04

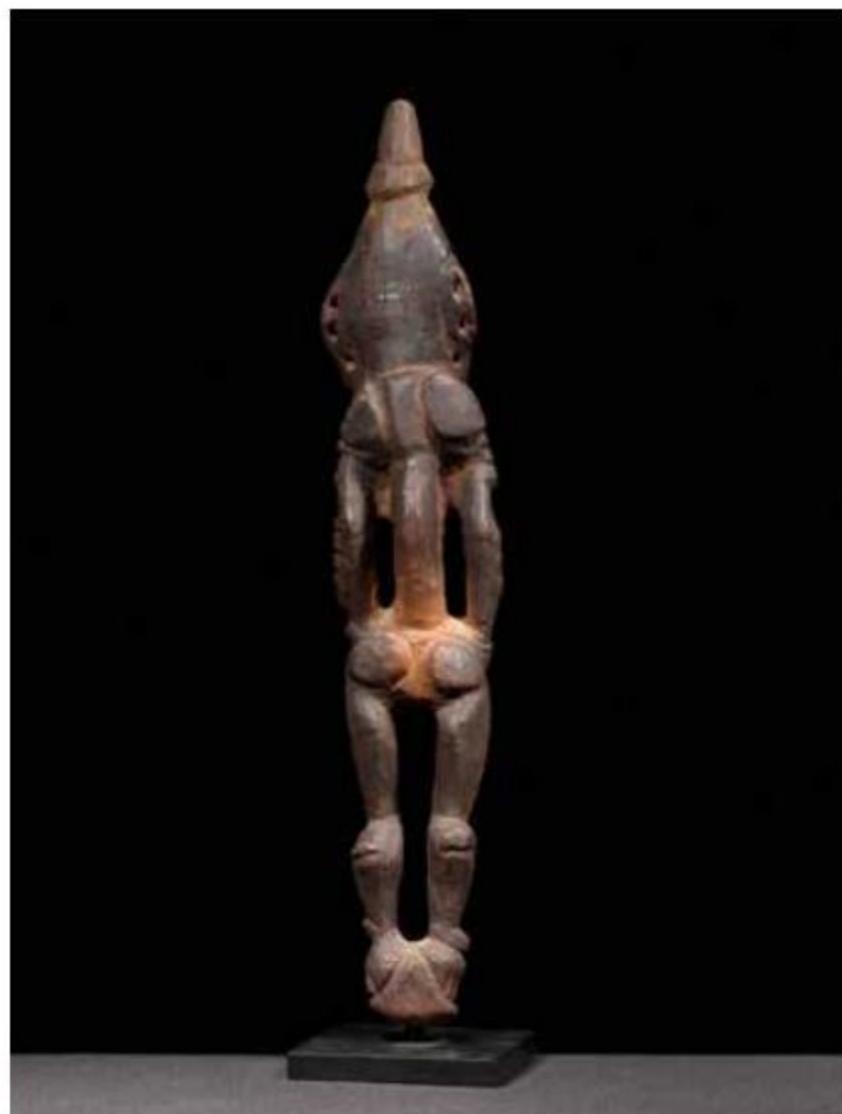
Coastal Sepik Ancestor Figure  
Height : 51 cm

• Provenance :

Collected before 1900 by P. Lüske, between the mouth of the Ramu and Hatzfeldhafen, circa 75 km to the east  
Köln, Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum  
Loed van Bussel, Amsterdam by exchange  
John Friede, Rye, New York  
Bruce Frank, New York  
Collection privée

• Publications :

Exposition coloniale à Köln en 1902  
Frank Herreman et alii, *Sculptuur uit Afrika en Oceaniën*,  
Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterloo, 1990, cat. 90,  
p. 239 (with the human hair whig attached)



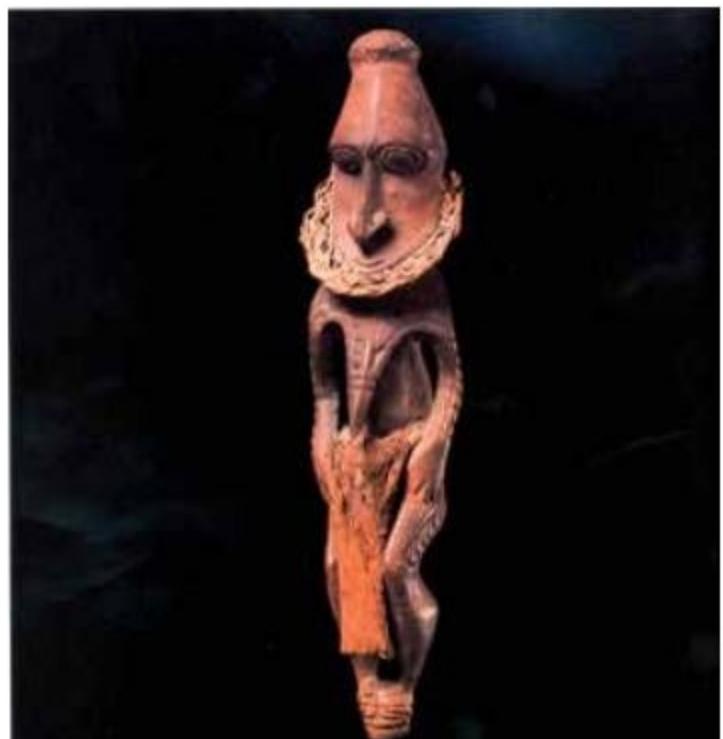


# 05

Coastal Sepik Ancestor Statue  
Height : 32 cm

• Provenance :

Ancienne Collection Ernest Le Véel, Paris avant 1930  
(Paris, Hotel Drouot, 17-18 novembre 2015, lot 126)



Coastal Sepik Figurine  
Height: 22.8 cm  
• Provenance:  
Collected by captain Haug of the Hamburg South Seas Expedition of 1908-11  
Hamburg, Museum für Völkerkunde inv. N° G7645 ("Kap. Haug")  
Serge Brignoni Collection, Berne  
John and Marcia Friede Collection Rye, NY  
• Publication:  
John Friede et alii, *New Guinea Art. Masterpieces from the Jolika Collection*, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco and 5 Continents, Milano, 2005, Vol. I, plate 46 and Vol. II, p. 90



# 06

Coastal Sepik Ancestral figure  
Height : 50,5 cm

• Provenance :  
Serge Brignoni, Berne, avant 1950  
Loed Van Bussel, Amsterdam  
Private Collection



Coastal Sepik Ancestor Statue, Village of Singarin  
Height: 60 cm  
• Provenance :  
Collection Madeleine Rousseau, Paris, avant 1940  
• Publication :  
Madeleine Rousseau « L'art océanien. Sa présence », in Le Musée vivant, L'art océanien, Paris, 1951, p. 74, fig. 126



# 07

Coastal Sepik Ancestral Figure

Height : 25,4 cm

• Provenance :

Tristan Tzara, Paris, before 1940

Christophe Tzara, Paris (Sotheby's London, *Primitive Art*,  
July 8, 1969, lot 145)

Private American Collection



Photo of the office of Tristan Tzara in his house  
designed by Adolph Loos in 1926



# 08

Coastal Sepik Ancestor statue

Height : 67 cm

Inagaki Base

• Provenance :

Maria Martins, Paris, circa 1930

Private Collection, New York



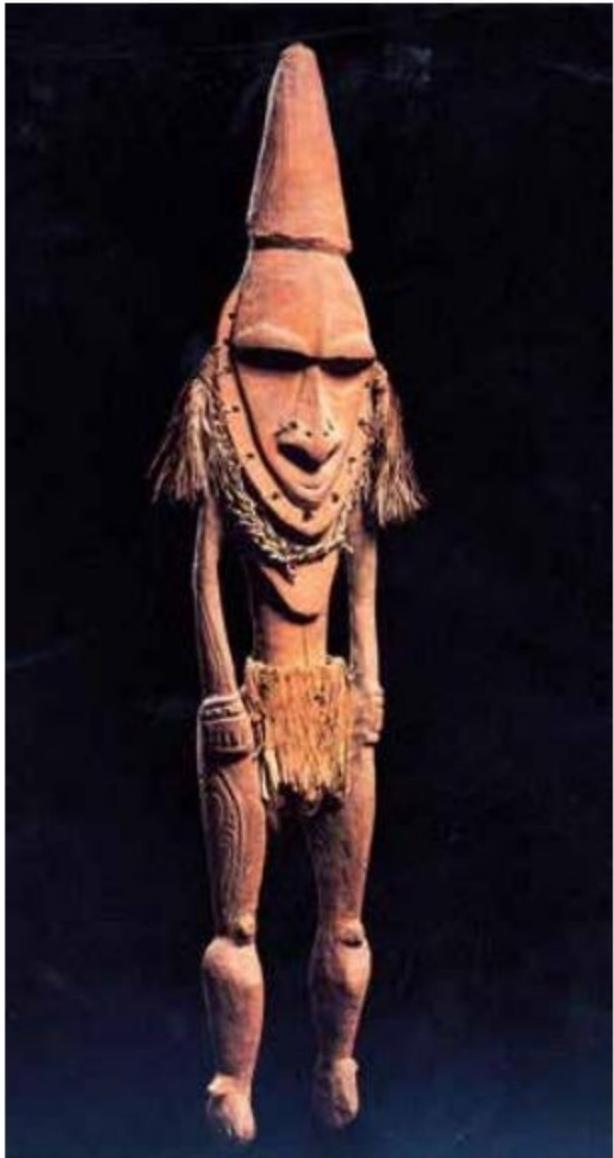
Photo of Frederick Kiesler with Yves Tanguy, Kay Sage, Marcel Duchamp and Maria Martins in Woodebury, CT in 1947



# 09

Lower Sepik River standing male Figure  
Height : 60,6 cm

- Provenance :  
Private East Coast Collection



Coastal Sepik Ancestor Figure  
Height: 69,5 cm  
• Provenance:  
Collected in 1908-11 during the Hamburg South Seas  
Expedition  
Hamburg Museum für Völkerkunde, inv. N° H 56729  
Serge Brignoni, Berne  
Marcia and John Friede Collection, Rye  
• Publication:  
*New Guinea Art. Masterpieces from the Jolika Collection*,  
San Francisco, 2005, p. 117, cat. 90



# 10



Coastal Sepik Ancestor Statue  
Height : 82,5 cm

• Provenance :

Han Coray Collection Zurich (1880-1974)  
On loan to Musée de l'Homme, Paris in 1933 inv. n° D 33.39/17  
On Loan Museum Rietberg, Zurich, circa 1954 inv. N° RM 100  
Leloup gallery, New York, 1982



Coastal Sepik Ancestor Figure height: 84 cm  
• Provenance:  
Collected on the Lower Sepik on the S.M.S. Cormoran, 1910  
Berlin Museum für Völkerkunde, inv. n° VI 30 054  
• Publication:  
Heinz Kelm, *Kunst vom Sepik III*, Berlin, Museum für Völkerkunde, 1968,  
plate 1



17

Coastal Sepik Ancestral Figure  
Height : 59 cm

• Provenance :

Ron and Barbara Perry, Sydney circa 1970's  
Galerie Meyer, Paris, 1986  
Collection Axel Cassel, Paris

• Publication :

*Melanesia : 20 works of Melanesian Art*, Paris, Galerie Meyer, 1989, p. 4 fig. 3



# 12

Coastal Sepik Ancestor Statue  
Height : 47,5 cm

• Provenance :  
Marcia and John Friede Collection, New York

• Publication :  
*New Guinea Art: Masterpieces from the Jolika Collection of Marcia and John Friede*,  
San Francisco, 2005, ill. 47





# 13

Coasta Sepik River standing Figure  
Height : 36,8 cm

• Provenance :  
Jerry Solomon, New York, circa 1980's  
Private Collection, New York



Coastal Sepik Figurine  
Height: 38 cm  
• Provenance:  
Bremen, Übersee-Museum, inv. N° D 4647  
• Publication:  
Ulrich Menter, *Ozeanien-Kult und Visionen*, Detmold, Lippischen Landesmuseum, Prestel Verlag, München, 2003, plate 4



# 14

Middle Sepik River flute stopper  
Height : 41,9 cm





# 15

Middle Sepik Lime Contenair  
Height : 57,5 cm

• Provenance :  
Gustave and Franyo Schindler, New York, before 1965  
Private collection, New York





# 16

Middle Sepik Sawos Group Hook  
Height : 86,4 cm

• Provenance :  
Barmen, Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft  
Von der Heydt Collection, 1910





# 17

Exceptional Male Ancestral Statue, Sawos Group, Middle Sepik  
Height : 257 cm

• Provenance :

Collected in Marp, plane of Burui Kunae, 2 hours walk from Yentchen on the Middle Sepik by Wayne Heathcote in 1964  
Collection John Friede, New York, 1970-2001





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